The Bloody End of Ernst Röhm:

The Night of the Long Knives

BY GEN. LEON DEGRELLE

A man who had not yet appeared openly in the Röhm-Schleicher-Strasser affair was Vice Chancellor Franz von Papen. Von Papen had been placed in this position close to Adolf Hitler by Oskar von Hindenburg on January 30, 1933, to keep an eye on the Führer, and after three months he was already hardly more than a vaguely recognized supernumerary in the chancellery. He was morose. That Hitler fellow, who was gaining an ever-greater following, was getting on his nerves. It irritated him. No one had ever followed him. In 1932, in the Reichstag, he had been whipped by a vote of no confidence, with 96 percent of the parliamentary vote line up against him. Impeccable in his cutaway and top hat, but, still, what did he amount to?

On June 14, 1934, Hitler had gone to Italy for his first visit with Mussolini. Papen, who was not brave by nature, was going to take advantage of this absence of his chief executive to make a speech against him three days after his departure which would be a rather pedantic match for the twisted intrigues and the delusions of his former friend, then ex-friend, then new friend, Gen. Kurt von Schleicher. The speech that Papen was going to make was not his own. A "ghost" had written it for him. His name was Edgard Jung, and his anti-Hitler writings were going to cost him rather dearly. Papen had chosen the town of Fulda, an old ecclesiastical metropolis, for pulling off his coup. The text that Jung had given him was almost laughably exaggerated, particularly inasmuch as it was supposedly written by a man who, while occupying the Reich's chancellorship before Hitler, had proved himself incapable of accomplishing anything at all.

That he, whose political past had been a cipher, should pretend to give lessons to someone who had just put more than two million of Germany's unemployed back to work in only a few months was utterly presumptuous.

Papen spelled out his prefabricated pages at Marburg with the conviction of a stationmaster: "Germany must not be a train launched haphazardly into the future, with nobody knowing where it will stop. . . . Great men are not created by propaganda, but by the valor of their actions and the judgment of history. . . . A defective or half-educated intelligence does not qualify one to engage in a battle against the spirit." But the bishops, champions in all types of political quarrels, and whose spokesman Papen had hoped to be that day, had immediately fallen silent, miters inclined meekly over their breviaries.

Bruning, the ex-chancellor, realizing that Papen's speech had misfired and smelled of heresy, would clear out that very week and make tracks for the Americas. When Hitler had deplaned on his return from Venice, he would make it his business to reply. After having read a report of the speech written by Papen's ghost writer, Hitler moved to deal with his very strange colleague, who had thought he was being so clever.

A few hours after landing, Hitler challenged him symbolically from the rostrum at a public meeting at Gera in Thüringen: "All these little midgets who imagine they have something to say will be swept away by the power of our idea of the community. Because, whatever criticisms they believe themselves capable of formulating, all these midgets forget one thing: where is this better thing that could replace what is? Where do they keep whatever it is they want to put in its place? Ridiculous, this little worm who wants to combat a so powerful renewal of a people."[1]

Schleicher, who had been delighted by Papen's sabotage,



The brown shirted storm-troopers, or Sturmabteilung *(literally "Storm Department" or SA), led by Adolf Hitler's old comrade-in-arms Ernst Röhm, were the Nazi faction who had done the street fighting and the window smashing of the early days. After the Nazis rose to power, a massive campaign was undertaken to give the SA a new public image as the heroic pioneers of law and order in the land. The German legend in this propaganda poster emphasizes the new image of civic virtue: "Service in the SA trains you for comradeship, tenacity and strength."*

was just putting the final touches on his future government. The list was already making the rounds: Everyone's role was already fixed, as we may read in Benoist-Méchin: "Hitler will be assassinated. Schleicher will become chancellor in his place. Gregor Strasser will receive the portfolio of national economy. As for Ernst Röhm, he will become minister of the Reichswehr."

"It is fitting," Schleicher says, "that the army and the national formations be in the same hands."

"Strasser and Röhm having approved his program, Schleicher felt assured of success."[2]

And so a general who was choking with ambition, a general who six months earlier, as minister of national defense, was directly responsible for the Reichswehr, was now determined to place all the generals of the Reichswehr, his own colleagues, under the command of Röhm, the constant insulter of the old army. Resentment had turned him into a traitor, this swaggering, cynical man. The thirst for power was consuming him with fury, and he was ready to ally himself with anyone to regain it. Harshly, historian Benoist-Méchin writes: "He considers that the hour has come to make someone pay for his disgrace. A general without an army, a fascist without conviction, and a socialist without any support among the working class, in losing his cabinet post he has lost his friends. But now that events seem to be turning in his favor, he sees the possibility of getting it all back with a single blow.[3]

Rumors leaked out concerning the still semisecret crisis, causing frightened reactions. On June 25 of 1934, Hitler was informed that in 15 days the gold reserves of the Reichsbank had dwindled from 925 million marks to 150 million. "The agitation of the SA has caused disquiet in industrial and banking circles."

Everything tallied: the army threatened; anarchy on the horizon; the specter of devaluation hanging over the Reich. Hitler's lieutenants raised their voices. Rudolf Hess on June 26, 1934, announced on the radio at Cologne: "The Führer will pardon minor personal deviations considering the magnitude of the achievements made. But if the Party is obliged to join

battle, it will do so according to the National Socialist principle: if you strike, strike hard."

"National Socialism can not be replaced," he added, "not by hand-picked conservative forces nor by criminal intrigues given the pompous name of 'second revolution.' Adolf Hitler is, and remains, a revolutionary in the grand style. He has no need of crutches." Hermann Göring was just as firm at Hamburg, on June 28: "Pulling a people out of the mire to raise it toward the sun is a superhuman task. The basis on which the Reich rests is confidence in the Führer." Then his warning sounded like the crack of a rifle: "Whoever seeks to destroy that confidence has signed his death warrant."

More and more precise information was brought to Hitler, some of it real and some no doubt exaggerated by uneasy imaginings or understood only more or less exactly by the listening services. These transcriptions of wiretapped telephone conversations of the conspirators were full of gross insults directed at Hitler. Secret agents followed the suspects. Letters were seized as well, very accusing letters. Göring was most impressed by the documents.

"Feverish preparations are also being made in the National Socialist camp. The black militia are in a state of alert. A certain number of SS sections are armed with rifles and 120 cartridges per rifle. The shock troops known as the SS Section Grossbeeren are on a war footing. Certain formations of the automobile corps, or NSKK, are mobilized and armed with carbines."[4]

It is June 28, 1934: Hitler has left for Essen, where he has to attend a wedding and to meet some big industrialists in the field of metallurgy. On the following day, June 29, 1934, he will inspect the Labor Service camps in Westphalia. Then, out of the blue, he is going to receive news of the most alarming nature: "Röhm has given orders to all the SA commanders to join him on the shores of the Tegernsee [Lake Tegern] on the afternoon of June 30, and all units of the SA have received orders to remain at the disposal of their commanders."[5]

Now, the next day, the first of July, is precisely the day when the leave decreed by Hitler for the 3 million men of the SA is to begin. Hitler himself has given us an account of these particularly dramatic hours.

> **The mobilization of the SA on the eve of their departure on leave seemed to me very unusual. I decided therefore to relieve the chief of staff of his duties on Saturday, June 30; to put him under close arrest until further orders; and to eliminate a certain number of SA commanders whose criminal activities were notorious.**
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> **Given the tenseness of events, I thought that the chief of staff would probably not obey me if I ordered him to Berlin or elsewhere. I consequently resolved to go myself to the conference of the commanders of the SA. Relying on my personal authority and on the decisiveness that had never failed me in critical moments, I planned to arrive there on Saturday at noon, to dismiss the chief of staff on the spot, to arrest the principal instigators of the plot, and to address a rousing appeal to the commandants of the SA to recall them to their duties.**[6]

Hitler has just ended his Westphalia visit amongst the young workers. He has arrived to spend the night at a hotel he is fond of, the home of an old comrade, Herr Dreesen. From his balcony he looks out over a beautiful stretch of the Rhine. As if the heavens wish to join in his personal drama, a storm, thunderclaps and flashes of lightning burst in a veritable Wagnerian hurricane. Goebbels has come at 9:30 p.m. in a special plane from Berlin to bring him other messages that have come in hour by hour to increase the disquiet.

"The alert has been given in the capital for the following day at 4 p.m. Trucks have been requisitioned to transport the shock troops; the action will begin at 5 p.m. sharp with the sudden occupation of the ministerial buildings."[7]

There is no time to sift through each of the reports, to weigh which are true and which fraudulent or imaginary. "I've had enough of this." Hitler cries. "It was imperative to act with lightning speed. Only a swift and sudden intervention was perhaps still capable of stemming the revolt. There was no room for doubt here: it would be better to kill 100 conspirators than to let 10,000 innocent SA men and 10,000 equally innocent civilians kill each other."[8]

Hitler reflects for several minutes. All the others around him remain silent. Dealing severely with old comrades from the early fighting days is rending his feelings. "I was filled with respectful admiration," Paul Joseph Goebbels will later relate, "a witness to that silence, for that man upon whom rested the responsibility for the fate of millions of human beings and whom I saw in the process of weighing a painful choice. On the one hand the peace and tranquillity of Germany, on the other those men who up to now had been his intimate friends."[9] "However far they've gone astray, they are fighting comrades. For years they have shared the same anxieties, the same hopes, and it is with horror that he finds himself forced to be severe with them."[10]

"It caused me a great deal of pain," Hitler admitted. But when it is necessary, a leader must rise above his attachments. Hitler is going to anticipate the meeting called by Röhm and get there before anyone else. He will not saddle anyone else with the dangerous mission. He will go himself. Six persons in all will accompany him, with Goebbels sticking close to his chief.

At Godesberg, Hitler's personal plane is damaged. Happily for him. Because at the Munich airfield they were lying in wait for his plane. A replacement Junkers is brought out, and they climb into the black sky still marked by the storm. Hitler does not say a word during the two hours in the air. Will he still be alive this very evening? He is an old soldier, and he will hurl himself straight at the obstacle, as he did at the front in Flanders and at Artois. He still had time before the plane took off to receive a telephone message from the *gauleiter* of Munich, Wagner: "11:45 p.m. Several hundred SA men have gone through the streets shouting abusive slogans against Hitler and the Reichswehr and chanting their song: 'Sharpen your long knives on the edge of the sidewalk'."

Leaping hastily from his Junkers at Munich, Hitler immediately goes up to the two SA generals there to meet

Röhm in the afternoon and tears the silver leaves from their collars. Immediately afterward he sets off by car for the village of Wiessee, where Röhm is staying. With him in the car are Goebbels, Otto Dietrich—his press attaché—and three bodyguards.

A truck carrying some SS men overtakes them on the way. "*Mein Führer*," Goebbels says, "the one who strikes first holds the winning hand. The first round in a fight is always decisive." To strike before anyone else is precisely what Hitler has in mind. As a true fighter, he is going to pounce.

The tension between Hitler and Röhm had been building for quite a while. At last it was to reach its deadly climax, on June 30, 1934. Adolf Hitler is first to leap from the car onto the porch of the Hanselbauer boardinghouse, where Ernst Röhm and his staff are sleeping. It will only take a few seconds from start to finish. The entry door is sent flying. Hitler rushes in. Goebbels and the few SS of the escort run from room to room and burst in before a single sleeper can budge. And what sleepers. The most inveterate of Röhm's accomplices, Heinz, who had paraded with him so arrogantly at Breslau just a while ago leading nearly 100,000 SS members, is still sleeping, stark naked, clinging to his chauffeur. He tries to seize a revolver, is dumbfounded. It has been Hitler's wish that he arrest Röhm personally.

"Alone and without any weapons," wrote Churchill admiringly, "Hitler mounted the staircase and entered Röhm's room."[11] Röhm's face turned crimson at the sight of Hitler, his features still more marked by the drinking bout of the previous night. He was dragged outside and shoved into a truck with several other survivors. Hitler turned away from him as though dismayed.

Suddenly then, there appeared a series of cars arriving at Wiessee with a first lot of the principal SA commanders coming to Röhm's meeting. Hitler rushed into the road, stopped the vehicles and then personally arrested those of the leaders whose complicity was known to him. He knew precisely who Röhm's confederates were and who were the ones not informed, and the latter were released immediately. The others soon found themselves in the Munich prison. Benoist-Méchin has revealed:

> **These latter had intended to let the other officers in on their plans during the course of the Wiessee conference, thus confronting them with a *fait accompli*, since the action was to begin at almost the same time in Berlin and in Munich. Those who could not be won over to Röhm's side would have been arrested and handed over to the commando shock troops.**

It is not hard to guess what the commandos would have done with them.[12]

Just at that moment (at 7:45 a.m.) the commando shock troops especially created by Röhm were also arriving, transported by a column of trucks. That irruption of commandos at such an early morning hour was revealing. If the shock troops were getting here that early, it could only mean they had received orders at dawn for the very special mission that Röhm intended to assign them. And for the second time it was the Führer himself who then and there went to intervene.

"Hitler, still without weapons, advances toward the detachment commander and orders him, in a tone brooking no answer, to turn around and go back to his quarters. The detachment commander complies, and the column of trucks goes off back in the direction of Munich."[13]

Thus at every stage it was Hitler who braved the risks and put his own life on the line. Churchill has written: "If Hitler had arrived an hour later, or the others an hour sooner, history would have taken a different turn."[14]

Other SA bigwigs were due to arrive in Munich by train. The moment they got off, they were arrested one after the other right at the station. When Hitler got back to the "Brown House" at 11 o'clock in the morning, he had the list of prisoners sent to him immediately. There were 200. He himself checked off on the sheet the names of the leaders most implicated, to be shot. Not there either did he try to saddle someone else with the decision and the execution order. Responsible for his country, he took his responsibilities to his country very seriously. Churchill himself would be obliged to recognize the fact:

"By his prompt and ruthless action he had assured his position and no doubt saved his life. That 'Night of the Long Knives,' as it was called, had preserved the unity of National Socialist Germany."[15] The afternoon of that same day, the SA commanders checked off on the list were brought to face firing squads. "It is the will of the Führer. *Heil Hitler!* Ready. Aim. Fire!"

That took place at exactly 5 o'clock in the afternoon, the hour when those executed would presumably have ended their meeting with Röhm.

And Röhm? He was still alive. Hitler was still hesitating "because of services rendered." It was not until the next day that Hitler, mastering his personal feelings and bitterness, would accept, at Göring's insistence, that the chief culprit finally be executed.

At that moment Hitler declared that it would be necessary to let Röhm carry out his own execution. A revolver was placed within reach of his hand. He refused to touch it. Ten minutes later a burst of machine-gun fire killed him in his cell. Hitler, true to his friends to an almost impossible degree, received the news with dismay. "When a young SS officer hands Hitler a message telling him that Röhm has rejected suicide and has been killed, Hitler's face grows very pale. He puts the message in his pocket. A few minutes later he withdraws to his apartment."[16] Hitler had an iron fist. But he couldn't bring himself to use it on an old comrade.

Hitler had returned to Berlin by 6 o'clock in the evening of the same day. He had landed at Tempelhof without a hat, "his face as white as chalk, fatigued by a night without sleep, unshaven, offering his hand in silence to those who were waiting for him." Göring presented him with a list; at Berlin, too, the repression had been swift and severe, harsher than at Munich. The civilians implicated had been executed at the same time as the SA commanders linked to Röhm and to Gen.

Kurt von Schleicher. From the moment of receiving the watchword "hummingbird" at dawn, a column of mobile guards had joined Göring's personal guard. Göring, like Hitler, had made them a brief speech: "It will be necessary to obey without question and to have courage, for putting someone to death is hard."

In a flash the commanders who were in league with Röhm and Schleicher were arrested and lined up against a wall at the Lichterfelde prison. And here, too, it was the chief who made the decisions. One by one, Göring looked each prisoner in the face. This one. That one. As at Munich, he personally and on the spot stripped those most deeply involved of their rank before their execution. Gisevius, though a most notorious anti-Hitlerite, has felt it necessary to make mention the confessions of the guilty:

"Uhl is the one who affirmed, a little while before he was shot, that he had been designated to assassinate Hitler; Balding, one of the section commanders of the SA, that he would have made an attempt against [Heinrich] Himmler." Ernst, the boozer with a dozen cars, who spent 30,000 marks per month on banquets, had been seized at the very moment when he was about to leave for the Canaries. Hardly more than a few hours, and it was all over.

Those mentioned were not the only ones to perish. At Berlin, the political center of all these intrigues, various important civilians had been mixed up in the affair. First there had been Vice Chancellor Franz von Papen, the sly schemer. That morning his arrogance rapidly diminished. Göring had personally treated him with consideration. They were colleagues. Papen was still vice chancellor.

"I very strongly advise you," Göring told him, "to stay at home and not to go out for any reason." He had immediately understood and scurried away to safety. He would stay buried at home without giving a moment's thought to his close colleagues sitting in his ministry, even those who had prepared for him the malicious text of his speech at Marburg prior to Röhm's operation.

As for what might happen to them as soon as he abandoned them at the Vice-Chancellery, he would pay no heed. Afterward he would never ask for a word of explanation concerning them, nor would he express a single regret. They would die that morning nevertheless. His right-hand man, Erich Klausener, had tried to flee and had been killed by two bullets fired through his half-open door. He had wanted, on leaving, to get his hat, and that had made him lose the few fatal seconds. He died with his hat on like a conscientious citizen.

Papen's own private secretary, Herbert von Bose, would fall right in the cabinet building. Edgard Jung, Papen's chief writer, the one who had drafted his tirade of June 17 for him word for word, would be mowed down just like the two others. Thus, after having been abandoned heroically by Papen, the first clique was done away with.

Next it would be the turn of the Schleicher-Röhm government's future minister of industry, Gregor Strasser. He had hidden in a factory that made pharmaceutical products. He was caught there, and he was not long in being liquidated. And what of the most important of the plotters, the future chancellor of post-Hitler Germany, Gen. Schleicher? He had been the first to pay. He had not even had time to seek a refuge. He had been surprised in his office and shot down dead before he could utter a cry. His wife, who had flung herself upon him, had died bravely under the same hail of bullets.

Always when such things happen, over-excitable people go too far or indulge their darker instincts, and in the violence of the brawl, some innocent people did get hurt. These casualties are what today we chastely call "regrettable mistakes." More than one occurred on June 30, 1934. A peaceable professor named Schmit was confused with one of the conspirators of the SA: they both bore the same surname and first name.[17]

Victim of another mistake was an old and good friend of Hitler's, Father Schlemper, a former Jesuit. In the heat of such operations, where for an hour perhaps public tranquillity is at stake, errors and excesses do take place: they are regrettable, condemnable and, no matter what one does, inevitable.

In August and September of 1944, one Charles de Gaulle would show very little concern when his partisan thugs, with abominable refinements of cruelty, assassinated tens of thousands of Frenchmen (104,000 according to official U.S. figures) quite simply because their ideas of what was good for France differed from his. And among all the killers of 1944, communist and Gaullist alike, not a single one, not even of those caught red-handed in the worst excesses, would ever be the object of sanction. The same is true of Belgium, where the assassins who freely massacred, in isolated villages, hundreds of parents and children of the Volunteers of the Eastern Front, would without exception enjoy total immunity from punishment in 1945; indeed, they would receive pensions, would be decorated.

If Hitler was forced to act severely on June 30, 1934, he had brought himself to it not a moment too soon. He might easily have been forestalled that day by the Röhms and the Schleichers. His indecision during May and June very nearly proved fatal. From the moment he became aware that mistakes or abuses had been committed, he took action with equal severity against the police or militiamen who had committed them. Three such were shot that same evening. "I shall order punishment," he exclaimed, "for those who have committed excesses. I most emphatically forbid any new acts of repression."

In his book, *The Storm Approaches*, Churchill would make it a point of honor to repeat—almost with admiration—the reasons that obtained with Hitler when he saw there was no other solution but to crush the imminent rebellion: "It was imperative to act with lightning speed at that most decisive of all hours, because I had only a few men with me. . . . Revolts are always put down by iron laws that are ever the same." Churchill, in a similar case—one may be sure—would certainly have reacted with a harshness one hundred times more implacable.

How many dead were there? There, as in everything else when it comes down to rapping Hitler, the figures tossed out have been prodigious. A thousand dead according to some. More than a thousand dead according to others. "The estimates

as to the number of persons liquidated vary from five to seven thousand persons," Churchill would later write, as if ashamed of having more or less praised Hitler for his energy.

What is the evidence to support such claims? None. These fantastic figures were thrown into the air to chill the blood of the great public outside of Germany. For the warmongering press that had been howling at Hitler's heels for nearly two years, it offered a great opportunity to heap opprobrium upon him, albeit with a shameless disregard of truth or even probability. That method of provocation, repeated at every turn from January of 1933 on, was infallibly conducive to the furious hatreds that degenerated into World War II in 1939.

If we stick honestly to the historically established exact figures, how many plotters or confederates fell on June 30, 1934? Seventy-seven in all, Hitler affirmed to the Reichstag. Even an enemy as impassioned as Gisevius, the ex-Gestapo member, had to admit, doubtless unwillingly: "If we are to believe the rumors, there were supposedly more than a hundred men shot on that Sunday alone at Lichterfeld. But that figure is certainly exaggerated; in all probability there were no more than 40."[18] Well, there was no other day of execution but "that Sunday." Recapitulating all the names he was able to collect throughout the entire Reich, Gisevius arrived at 90 men executed. Moreover, he further adds: "supposing the figure to be exact."[19]

And the other 910 . . . or 6,830 . . . whose execution was trumpeted around the planet by the Churchills or junior Churchills? Gisevius, who was on the spot and had anti-Nazi informers all about, didn't arrive at a hundredth of Churchill's figure, and he had only this pitiful explanation to offer: "Those who had been listed as dead turned up again at the end of a few weeks." In a few hours, and at a price that when all is said and done was not very high—about one death per million German citizens—Hitler had restored order to his country.

"Never was a revolution less costly and less bloody," Goebbels would be able to say.

The anguished screams and the lies of foreign critics were the most arrent hypocrisy. What did the swift execution of a handful of mutineers on the verge of rebellion amount to alongside the wholesale slaughter perpetrated by the so-glorified grand *ancêtres* of the French Revolution?

Napoleon himself had Gen. Malet shot for conspiracy. The duc d'Enghien was killed at his order in the ditches of Vincennes. He exterminated tens of thousands of Breton opponents in his punitive expeditions. "A political act is not judged by the victims it makes but by the evils it averts." It was the philosopher Joseph de Maistre who said that, a century and a half before Röhm and Schleicher were executed. With undeniable personal courage, Hitler had been able to control the situation at limited cost and in a minimum of time.

It cannot be doubted that without his resolution, Germany would have fallen into chaos, and rapidly. The army would certainly have moved to block Röhm, resulting perhaps in thousands of deaths and an immediate collapse of the economic recovery. The shouts of triumph that went up abroad to see this brief outburst of violence taking place in Germany were very significant; one would imagine they were already sounding the mort.

It was not only Hitler's right but his duty to take the red-hot iron from his forge and cauterize the canker to the bone. He did so with the force and the promptness that were needed to spare the nation anything beyond the swift and radical elimination of the corruption. He was the judge and the sword. A true leader in such hours of extreme peril must face up to things, not hesitate a second, but decide and act.

The German people understood as much even that same evening. When Hitler, his face ashen after such a tragic event, left the Tempelhof airfield at six o'clock in the evening, a group of slaters working there on a roof let out a shout: "Bravo, Adolf." In their admiration they called him by his first name. Twice more they shouted their "Bravo, Adolf." It was the first salute of the people on the return of the lover of justice.

A few hours later, another "Bravo, Adolf," was going to ring out, this one still more impressive than the bravo of the slaters; it was that of the highest authority of the Reich, old Marshal von Hindenburg. That same evening he had telegraphed the Führer from his Neudeck estate, "It appears from reports given me that you have crushed all the seditious intrigues and attempted treason. Thanks to your personal, energetic and courageous intervention, you have saved the German people from a grave peril. Let me express to you my profound gratitude and sincere esteem. Signed: von Hindenburg."

Freed of the threat of a fratricidal subversion, the army, too, at once fell in line unanimously behind the Chancellor. As soon as von Hindenburg's message reached Berlin, the minister of national defense issued an order of the day to the Wehrmacht:

> **The Führer has personally attacked and crushed the rebels and traitors with the decisiveness of a soldier and with exemplary courage. The Wehrmacht, as the only armed force of the nation as a whole, while remaining aloof from internal conflicts, will express to him its recognition of his devotion and fidelity. The Führer asks us to maintain cordial relations with the new SA. Aware that we serve a common ideal, we shall be happy to do so. The state of alert is lifted throughout the entire Reich.**
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> **Signed: von Blomberg**

And the SA? No single act of resistance or complicity would be noted anywhere in the entire Reich after June 30, 1934. For almost all the SA members, it was Hitler who counted, not the men shot.

The latter had been six or seven dozen all told and were either coldly ambitious, like Schleicher, or else leftist adventurers like Röhm, as well as a few accomplices whose heads had been turned by their unwonted rise and who clamored for still more. "After all," Gisevius would acknowledge, dealing them the unkindest cut of all, "it was only a matter there of a very tiny clique: group staff officers with their paid guards, a bunch of hoodlums such as are to be found anywhere there's disorder or a row."[20] The bulk of the SA would not have let

themselves be led disastrously astray.

The French ambassador, François-Poncet, Schleicher's and Röhm's old friend, would later write: "Even if Röhm and Schleicher had been able to carry out their plot, they would have failed." Their revolt would have ended in a bloody massacre probably a hundred times more murderous than the brief repression of June 30. They had not even been able to act in good time. Gisevius would add: "The history of June 30 comes down to the choice of the opportune moment. Röhm fell because he let the favorable hour slip by. The Göring-Himmler team (and Hitler, of course) won because it acted at the proper time."

Karl Marx had said it a century earlier: "Neither nations nor women are spared when they are not on their guard." Hitler had been on his guard.

With black humor, Göring remarked: "They prepared a second revolution for the evening of June 30, but we made it instead—and against them."

Hitler was hardly more than awake the next morning, the first of July, 1934, when continuous cheering rose up from below the windows of the chancellery. Gisevius, who at that time was not yet secretly betraying the Nazi regime, was in the chancellery when Hitler drew near to the balcony. "On this occasion," he later noted, "I had an unexpected opportunity to see Hitler up close. He was at the famous window and had just received the ovation of the people of Berlin who had come there in throngs."

He made a deep bow when Hitler passed in front of him, but he was consumed with fear. "Under the insistence of that caesar-like gaze, I almost wanted to crawl into a hole."[21] The caesar of the chancellery had shown guts and a sense of strategy, and the people massed in the street below cheering him, with a sure intuition of the danger and the successful outcome, had understood.

By July 2, 1934, the whole of Germany was back on track. The SA and the army were reconciled. The political and social reunification of the Reich had been achieved in 1933. Now, at the beginning of July of 1934, military and ideological reunification were about to be realized.

Pledges of loyalty to Hitler were coming from all sides. Even the high clergy sanctimoniously followed suit. Dr. Hjalmar H.G. Schacht himself found no grounds for reproach. No more than a few days after the executions he would calmly enter the Hitler government, now purged of Röhm's presence.

On July 13, 1934, speaking before the Reichstag, with the entire German nation glued to their radios, Hitler assumed full responsibility for his actions:

> **The guilty paid a very heavy tribute: Nineteen superior officers of the SA and 31 SA commanders and members of the brown-shirt militia were shot; three SS commanders and civilians implicated in the plot suffered the same fate; 13 SA commanders and civilians lost their lives resisting arrest; three others committed suicide; five party members no longer belonging to the SA were also shot. Three SS men who had been guilty of mistreating prisoners were shot.**
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> **If anybody blames me for not having referred the guilty to the regular courts, I can only reply: it was only by decimating them that order was restored in the rebel divisions.**
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> **I personally gave the order to shoot the guilty. I also gave orders to take a red-hot iron to the wound and burn to the flesh every abscess infecting our internal life and poisoning our relations with other countries. And I further gave the order to shoot down immediately any rebel who made the least attempt to resist arrest. In that hour I was responsible for the fate of the German nation, and I was thereby the supreme judge of the German people.**

If there was still a saboteur remaining in the shadows, Hitler was bent on warning him that a fate like that of Schleicher's and Röhm's awaited him: "Any show of a plot, or complicity in a plot, will be smashed without any regard for rank or person."

Believing that Hitler was going to be overthrown, the warmongers abroad—notably French Council President Doumergue, the vindictive and authoritarian little old Provençal—rejoiced too soon. It was Doumergue who would be ousted from power, rejected by the French people that same year. While out of the tragedy of June 30, 1934 had come a stronger Germany, freed of all threat of internal subversion and with the army and the SA finally brought into mutual harmony. Politically, socially, militarily and ideologically, the Germans were now a united people.

The following month, by casting tens of millions of votes in favor of Hitler for the third time, Germany was going to make known to the whole world that she was forming around her leader the most formidable unity the Reich had ever known. ❖

FOOTNOTES:

1 Andre Brissaud, *Hitler et son temps*, 197.
2 Benoist-Méchin, *Histoire de l'Armee Allemande*, Vol. III, 189.
3 Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, vol. III, 188f.
4 Account of the events of June 30 from *The Manchester Guardian* of the following August 9.
5 Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 192.
6 Cited by Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, vol. III, 192.
7 Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, 194.
8 *Ibid.*
9 Brissaud, *op. cit.*, 201.
10 *Ibid.*
11 Churchill, *L'orage approche* ["The Storm Draws Near"], 100.
12 Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, vol. III, 197.
13 *Ibid.*
14 Churchill, *op. cit.*, 100f.
15 *Ibid.*
16 Brissaud, *op. cit.*, 210.
17 According to William Schirer, in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, the innocent man was Dr. Willi Schmid. The local SA leader was named Willi Schmidt. SA leader Willi Schmidt had in the meantime been arrested by another SS detachment and shot.—Ed.
18 Gisevius, *op. cit.*, 196.
19 *Ibid.*
20 Gisevius, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 132.
21 Gisevius, *op. cit.*, 68.

Leon Degrelle was an individual of exceptional intellect, dedicated to Western Culture. He fought not only for his country (Belgium) but for the survival of Christian Europe, preventing the continent from being inundated by Stalin's savage hordes. What Gen. Degrelle has to say, as an eyewitness to some of the key events in the history of the 20th century, is vastly important and has great relevance to the continuing struggle today for the survival of civilization as we know it.